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A LETTER TO DOCUMENTS LIBRARIANS FROM THE PUBLIC PRINTER OF THE UNITED STATES

The Depository Libraries and the United States Government Printing Office have made great strides into new technologies. Only 17 years ago, heeding the requests of many librarians, the Public Printer asked for "approval for the Government Printing Office to enter the field of micropublishing and to offer filmed documents to customers either in addition to or in lieu of printing." Shortly thereafter was formed a GPO Micropublishing Advisory Committee which studied the feasibility of this proposal. They conducted technical and cost analyses and developed a questionnaire surveying all depository libraries. Of those replying, 75% indicated a desire to be able to receive documents in microform.

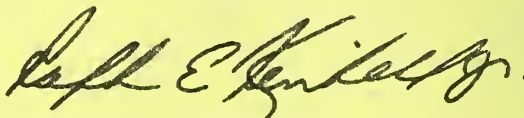
The rest is history. Actual distribution of a high quality, easily replaceable microfiche began in 1978 and was enthusiastically received by librarians. The savings in space enabled depositories to broaden their selections and make even more Government publications available to the American public. When Congressional bills were first offered in microfiche, one-half of the selecting depositories immediately switched; and an additional 400 libraries, which had not been receiving the bills at all, then opted to receive them in microfiche. By 1981, the demand for the microfiche was so great that bills in paper were no longer offered for depository selection. A similar pattern is emerging with Congressional reports and documents. Today, 61% of selecting depositories receive these publications in microfiche format.

Over the past 10 years micrographics has become an integral and indispensable part of the Federal Depository Library Program. The monetary savings to taxpayers and the space saved in documents collections have made microfiche an attractive alternative for many kinds of depository publications. And in today's climate of budget reductions, which includes the Government Printing Office, expanding the scope of microfiche use is a very real means of making our taxpayers' dollars go farther in bringing information to the public. This step will also make it easier when the time comes to take the next qualitative jump into the emerging technology.

Despite the need to reduce costs through technology, the future of the Depository Library Program could not be brighter. Just as micrographics technology was applied to advance the scope of the program during the past decade, so the newer technologies — optical disk, CD-ROM, and microcomputers — offer even greater promise for delivering Government information and services more effectively at lower costs in money, space, and time. The prospects for better service are exciting and almost without limit.

Your Public Printer's chart for navigating through today's rocky fiscal waters calls for continuing to implement the cost-savings afforded by microfiche. This will enable the program to operate within the limits of our Congressional appropriation. At the same time, depository libraries will be further accustoming documents users to the non-paper format and preparing the way for the next step into newer information technologies. Meanwhile, here at GPO we will continue to monitor the evolving information revolution and explore the new technologies for future use in the program. In this vein, we are looking forward to the study currently underway of the Depository Library Program by the Office of Technology Assessment, which should be ready in the spring of 1988.

Your concern for service, economy, and unobstructed access to the information in Government publications, is also my concern. The future is what we choose to wisely make it. Together, we are going to make it better. That is my promise.



—RALPH E. KENMICKELL, JR.